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## Views of an Iberian identity in the post-war world: Cultural heritage and politics as seen by Portuguese artists<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** Portugal and Spain never shared such a distinctive place in recent European history than in the post-war period. Despite the end of the Second World War and the Nazi-fascist defeat, the Iberian dictators, Salazar in Portugal and Franco in Spain, managed to retain their power. This article analyses the creative and theoretical responses of Portuguese artists to the political situation in the Iberian Peninsula taking into particular consideration their approaches to an Iberian identity. It argues that Paula Rego, Barto dos Santos and Ana Hatherly carried out a reinterpretation of cultural and artistic heritage, iconographic memories and historical narratives and, as a result, formulated alternative views of the past and the present that opposed the Iberian dictatorships' discourses of a glorious, imperialistic legacy that legitimated their ruling. By proposing to look at the references to Spain in Portuguese artists' work, this article evidences how Portuguese artists sympathized with the political troubles also endured by the Spanish people and singles out a perception of shared cultural traditions between Spain and Portugal. Finally, this article also emphasizes experimental practices and a deliberate eclectic appropriation and reconfiguration of contemporary or historical references that ultimately shaped attitudes of political resistance.

**Keywords:** Censorship; cultural identity; creative experimentalism; Iberian Peninsula; totalitarianism.

## [es] Perspectivas de una identidad ibérica durante la posguerra: Patrimonio cultural y política desde el punto de vista de artistas portugueses

**Resumen.** Portugal y España nunca estuvieron tan cerca en el contexto de la historia europea del siglo XX como durante el periodo posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Tanto Salazar como Franco consiguieron consolidar su poder y los regímenes totalitarios que presidían a pesar del final del conflicto y de la derrota del fascismo y del nazismo. Partiendo de este contexto, este artículo se centra en analizar las respuestas creativas y teóricas producidas por artistas portugueses a la situación política en el espacio ibérico de la posguerra, considerando en particular su interés por problematizar la identidad ibérica. En este ensayo se argumenta que Paula Rego, Barto dos Santos y Ana Hatherly llevaron a cabo una reinterpretación crítica del patrimonio cultural y artístico, de las memorias iconográficas y de las narrativas históricas ibéricas y que, como consecuencia de ello, formularon discursos subversivos sobre el pasado y el presente de Portugal y España. Dichos discursos contradecían la visión oficial de ambas dictaduras, basada ésta en un discurso celebratorio del legado imperial de los pueblos ibéricos que supuestamente legitimaba su razón de ser en el presente. Centrándome en las interpretaciones que los artistas portugueses ya mencionados llevaron a cabo sobre España, me propongo demostrar que el alineamiento de los artistas portugueses con los conflictos políticos que tenían lugar en territorio español implicaba un posicionamiento solidario, al tiempo que cimentaba lazos y tradiciones culturales

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compartidos entre ambas naciones. Por último, el ensayo destaca el experimentalismo artístico y la apropiación y reconfiguración intencionada de referencias históricas o contemporáneas como un mecanismo crucial para el desarrollo de una resistencia política y cultural.

**Palabras clave:** Censura; identidad cultural; experimentalismo artístico; Península Ibérica; totalitarismo.

**Sumario:** 1. Introduction. 2. Cultural and artistic approximations to Spain. 3. A geography of fear. 4. Haunting specters of the past. 5. Experimentalism vs Revivalism. 6. Conclusion. References.

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## 1. Introduction

The Portuguese artist Paula Rego (1935), who was living in England since 1951, followed closely the political situation in Portugal and Spain, where dictatorial regimes survived the end of the war and the defeat of the Nazi and Fascist regimes. In London, Rego had access to information that was blue-penciled in both countries and therefore to the most brutal aspects of Salazar's and Franco's regimes. Some of the news she read inspired paintings that dealt with the socio-political situation in the Peninsula, such as the sordid episode that took place in Barcelona and was reported by *The Times* in 1965:

The Barcelona authorities decided that there were too many stray dogs, and came up with the brutal plan of indiscriminately spreading pieces of poisoned meat throughout the city. To me, this reflected the political situation of the time, in both Spain and Portugal, since my country was ruled by an equally brutal dictatorship. (Rego & McEwen, 1988, n.p.)

Rego's statement is very clear about how the events occurring in Spain had a symbolical resonance for the Portuguese who opposed the dictatorial regime. There is even a more morbid detail in this story, as poor people also started eating the meat, falling dead afterwards like the dogs. In her painting, however, she focused on the latter, creating an arena-like space in which the moribund animals are gathered, harassed by flies; they are a mass of flesh and unidentified organic forms or deformed bodies (Fig. 1). The artist indicated that she had in mind the Catalan Romanesque paintings and specifically used a representation of the poor beggar Lazarus having his wounds licked by a dog<sup>3</sup>. This dog, which was able to perform such a merciful act, was now the innocent victim of political power, representing the cruelty and aggression inherent to totalitarianism.

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<sup>3</sup> Although in her conversation with John McEwen and in the statement to the *Web of Stories* website (Rego, s.d.) Rego mentioned as inspiration an image of Saint Jerome, her work was in fact based on the representation of Lazarus from the famous apse of Sant Climent de Taüll, today preserved at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.



Figure 1. Paula Rego, *The Dogs of Barcelona*, 1965. Oil, crayon and paper glued on canvas, 160 x 185 cm. Private collection. © Courtesy of The Artist and Marlborough, New York and London.

The violent and crude reflection proposed by Rego invokes the arenas of slaughter of Francis Bacon, who, like the Portuguese artist, was interested in carrying out a dissection of reality in order to reveal a more truthful image. Rego's imagery and creative experimentalism led her to incorporate stories and artistic references from Spain, which indicated a specific cultural geography and simultaneously the target of her visceral criticism. So, besides irony and subversion, Rego relied on visual tradition to tell dramatic stories about the present. The same resources were used by other Portuguese artists whose work and theoretical developments I will comment in this article. Like Rego, Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos or Barto dos Santos (1931–2008), how he was known in England, used images and creative practices of the past to formulate his opposition to the totalitarian, repressive and imperialistic order imposed by the Iberian dictatorships. Ana Hatherly (1929–2015), also approached the past, specifically the Baroque period, as an operative tool for dealing with the present. In her thoughts about the subject, she proposed that creative experimentalism confronted the past with contemporary times, thus disrupting temporal continuity and, consequently, official readings about history and cultural tradition that were promoted as definitive accounts. All in all, these artists' creative resistance conveyed, on the one hand, a sympathetic approach to the political troubles also endured by the Spanish people, and on the other hand, a perception of a shared cultural identity between Spain and Portugal.

These artistic and cultural approaches and critical reconfigurations of reality remain, however, restricted to a formal reading by Portuguese art historians. António Rodrigues in his assessment of the 1960s as "years of rupture" acknowledged that "all the artists of the decade... had in common their contempt for the political regime and its totalitarian values, but the way they contested it was individual and through the work of art, which was understood as having an autonomous cultural and social

value, that is, art was understood as an agent of culture, of a new visual culture” (Rodrigues, 1994, n.p.). Although pertinent, Rodrigues’s analysis does not develop its reference to artists’ political engagement with the argument about the autonomy of art and the circumscription of its territory of action in the cultural and artistic fields. He leaves therefore unexplored the implications of creative confrontation with totalitarianism, such as the cross-disciplinary topics of political resistance, critical appropriation of the past and subjective definitions of cultural identity. Spanish historiography has ascribed to modern art a relevant role in the social rebellion against the corrupt and oligarchic bourgeois system and the conservative and repressive morals dictated by the association of the Francoist regime with the Catholic Church (see Bravo, 1996; Marzo & Mayayo, 2015, pp. 149–151; López, 2017). This reading points to the missing links between political and artistic spheres in the Portuguese history. Portuguese art historiography should therefore also take into consideration the role of artistic practice in the deconstruction of the legacies of totalitarianism and colonialism.

In this context, it is necessary to clarify what political resistance means as a parenthetical note. Although the artists featured in this article were neither actively and publicly opposed to the regime (they even participated in exhibitions in the country and abroad that were promoted by the dictatorship), nor engaged in ideologically-based movements, such as Neo-realism, their artistic practice, based on autonomous and subjective expression, conveyed conflicting visions in relation to the propaganda of the Portuguese dictatorship. Resistance is in the case of the artists analyzed here a transgressive attitude towards the canons of self- and collective representation, which targets specifically the nationalistic discourse of the dictatorship and the elusive image of a colonial empire. Resistance is therefore enacted through creative productions that challenge ideological, historical, cultural and artistic formulae through which social codes of behavior and national identity are crystalized.

The creative articulations of Spanish culture, arts and history that this article addresses were, nevertheless, not directly connected to the contemporary artistic environment in Spain. As we will see, Rego, Santos and Hatherly were more interested in mirroring the Portuguese context through a similar political situation (approaching Spanish artistic heritage as a significant reference for visual creativity) and, finally, in defining a cultural and historical identity that encompassed both Portugal and Spain. Indeed, the exploration by the Portuguese artists of new perspectives on historical past and cultural heritage is one of the main guidelines for their political resistance against the Salazarist regime and its colonial policy. Questioning identity was also a way to rethink Portugal and its citizens within a democratic, cosmopolitan and modern Europe.

## 2. Cultural and artistic approximations to Spain

The end of the Second World War forced the opening of Portugal to the outside world and the participation of the country in transnational platforms and events during the 1950s. Salazar acknowledged that in order to survive in the new world context he had to put into action a plan of economic and industrial modernization and international convergence. For that purpose, Portugal joined international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization for European Economic Cooperation. The

membership of such institutions implied the acquiescence of the Western democracies to the dictatorship in Portugal, which was mainly justified by Salazar's commitment to fight communist influence in the country.

The new political, economic and diplomatic framework of the post-war Europe also influenced the Portuguese artists to rethink their place in the international context. Migration became in this period the key factor for the internationalization of artistic trajectories that had been already initiated in Portugal or would be developed abroad. The direct contact with new artistic, cultural and political realities triggered a critical reflection that associated creative individuality with creative responsibility in relation to the community of origin. Indeed, some of the artists that migrated to England in the 1950s spoke very often about "our people", the "peninsular reality" (Santos & Dias, 1999), "the impossibility to dismiss the condition of having been born in Portugal" (*Jorge Vieira*, 1971). As a consequence, we see in their work the intersection between individual awareness and the belonging to a historical and cultural territory, between self-determination and collective destiny.

Paula Rego and Barto dos Santos, who settled in London in the 1950s, identified common historical and cultural features between Spain and Portugal, such as the weight of religion in shaping moral and social behavior. They also indicated Spanish painting tradition as a major reference. Santos pointed to the image of bishops, which his prints satirized, as an iconographic element specific to the Iberian cultural and artistic environment. Rego depicted political events related to the Spanish civil war and dictatorship in order to criticize and condemn the totalitarian system that ruled both countries of the Iberian Peninsula.

Although, Portuguese artists were reacting to the political troubles of the present, the artistic approach to Spain was, therefore, configured by history and memory. So far, this investigation has pointed to limited contacts with Spanish contemporary arts in Portugal and abroad in the 1950s and 1960s, which possibly intensified the creative immersion in the historical past. The reviews concerning the Spanish art exhibitions organized in Portugal are a telling testimony of the lack of dialogue between the two artistic contexts. The articles published in that period have in common the same commentary, that the only thing that the displays of Spanish art were able to convey was a mishmash of styles and generations that hardly provided a clear image of the new and most relevant modern productions.

The exhibitions of Spanish art in Portugal were organized in most cases by the *Secretariado Nacional da Informação* (National Secretariat of Information), the official body responsible for the propaganda of the Portuguese regime<sup>4</sup>. Artistic events functioned for both countries as diplomatic initiatives and propagandistic tools in the field of international relations. National representations in international artistic shows, such as Biennials or world fairs, or the Hispano-American Biennials (1951–1956), associated modernity with the values of Spanishness and Portugueseness, which were promoted as global cultural achievements (see Bravo, 1996; López, 2017, pp. 59–69; Oliveira, 2013). The control of the message inside and outside the Iberian Peninsula was instrumental for the reshaping of new images of Portugal

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<sup>4</sup> The SNI, as it was generally called, was created in 1933 by the New State regime, as the Portuguese dictatorship was officially denominated, with the designation of Secretariat of National Propaganda. In 1945, with the end of the Second World War, this body became known as the National Secretariat of Information, maintaining the same tasks, such as the organization of national representations in artistic and cultural events abroad.

and Spain in the context of the post-war Europe. This new environment brings up important questions about the relationship between modern artists and totalitarian power. We may also wonder whether the selection of artists and works representing the countries corresponded to a rigorous perspective on artistic production or to a strategic political planning. For the Portuguese art critics, the dictatorial nature of the Iberian regimes and the consequent censorship of any supposedly subversive message prevented both contexts from having access to the most meaningful contemporary artistic practices and creations from each country.

In 1964, the art critic Fernando Pernes (1936–2010), who contributed for *Colóquio*, the arts journal published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, warned the possible visitor of the exhibition with art from Spain and Latin America that he or she would probably feel deluded by the title of the show since there were “unforgivable” absences among the Spanish representation<sup>5</sup>. Given the serious anthological errors, the artistic panorama provided by the event was “inversely proportional” in relation to the diplomatic ambitions that staged it. For this reason, Pernes expressed in the end of the article his wish to comment in the near future the works of Tàpies and Saura. He concluded, however, that that opportunity would not be “authorized” (Pernes, 1964, p. 47).

The Galeria Diário de Notícias (1957–1964), which belonged to one of the most referential daily newspapers in the country, had a special role in bridging Portuguese and Spanish contemporary arts. This gallery organized in Lisbon displays of Spanish artists and in Madrid a presentation of Portuguese authors<sup>6</sup>. In Portugal, the gallery presented the work of Antonio Guijarro, Joan Fluviá and Jorge Castillo in 1961, secondary names of the modern arts in Spain that confirmed the discreet presence of contemporary production of this country in its neighboring artistic context. However, in 1965, another private gallery, Divulgação, staged an exhibition dedicated to the work of Manolo Millares, one of the most relevant names of Spanish artistic scene. The importance of this show was signaled by Pernes, who highlighted the material nature of color in Millares’s works. According to him, its “porosity and pasty density give the paintings the organic sense of tattered monsters or soaked in bloody reds, suddenly emerged in images of pain whose strength of protest elevates as a lyrical catharsis” (Pernes, 1965, p. 58). This dramatic analysis and the violence it suggests call inevitably to mind a symbolical expression of war and repression not only from Spain’s recent history but also from Portugal’s military conflict in Africa<sup>7</sup>.

In 1959, a similar commentary was made about Tàpies’s works in the context of the exhibition *Vinte anos de pintura espanhola contemporânea* (Twenty Years

<sup>5</sup> Pernes is referring to the exhibition *Arte da América e Espanha: Desenho e Gravura* (Art from America and Spain: Drawing and Printmaking), which was held at the headquarters of the *Secretariado Nacional da Informação*, the Foz Palace, in March 1964. In November of the same year the *Secretariado* organized another exhibition of Spanish art, *Vinte e cinco artistas espanhóis* (Twenty-five Spanish artists), which included works by Modesto Cuixart, Maria Girona, José Guinovart, Cesar Manrique, Joaquin Michavila, Agustin Redondela, Gustavo Torner, Francisco Valbuena, Roman Valles, Vicente Vela, Victor Ventura and Antonio Zarco, among others.

<sup>6</sup> In 1962, this gallery organized in Madrid, at the Club Urbis an exhibition of contemporary Portuguese production. See the catalogue *15 pintores de Lisboa seleccionados por la Galeria Diario de Noticias* (1962).

<sup>7</sup> In 1961, the colonial war broke out in Angola after a violent guerrilla attack in the north of the region. In the end of that year, the Indian Union invaded the Portuguese territories of Goa, Daman and Diu. Although the Portuguese military forces surrendered in India, war in Africa carried on until 1974, when the Portuguese dictatorship finally collapsed as a result of a military coup.

of Spanish Contemporary Painting), which was organized at the headquarters of the National Secretariat of Information in Lisbon. José-Augusto França (1922) considered the artist as “one of the greatest painters of his generation” and his art “terribly dramatic, threatening”, which conveys “an active sadness that slowly absorbs the world that surrounds it – it does not refuse a humor that the lyricism suggests” (França, 1959, p. 40). Nonetheless, contact with Tàpies’s work had to be established elsewhere (França mentions the exhibition of Spanish art in London organized by the Arts Council in 1956), since in the Lisbon show there was only one painting of the artist displayed. Pernes also regretted that the most spectacular compositions by Millares did not travel to Portugal due to the “natural difficulties of temporary importation of foreign artworks” (Pernes, 1965, p. 58).

In 1966, the art critic Rui Mário Gonçalves (1934–2014) recalled the first article he had written, which had as purpose to examine the mentioned exhibition of twenty years of Spanish contemporary painting. However, in this review, which took the form of a conversation between Gonçalves and the painter José Escada, little attention was paid to the exhibition, given the failure of its organizers to defend the “modern values” represented by the Spanish Informalism. Instead, the show mixed contrasting creative directions, including academic and naturalist expressions, and forgot such names as “Gris, Picasso, Miró...”. While remembering this first text, Gonçalves admitted seven years later that Tàpies was then their hero (Gonçalves, 1994, n.p.).

Informalism was in the late 1950s mostly associated with a new generation of Portuguese artists whose main creative references came from Paris. In Gonçalves’s reading, this trend, together with the new aesthetic proposals associated with a “new figuration”, contained simultaneously an experimentalist nature and previous, enduring cultural elements, which gave to the new aesthetic experiences a specific meaning. He defended the “implicit critical component of an artwork”, which stemmed from its relation to society, and pointed to the effects that, in the new technological era, art could produce, especially by creatively advancing new forms of social manifestations. Gonçalves’s points of view may sound vague or unspecific, probably resulting from the permanent control of censorship. What he probably intended to argue was the projection or reshaping of creative attitudes and the consequent activation of new values, which a stagnated political system could not develop. His admiration for the work of Tàpies was possibly based on the creative appropriation and transformation of material reality. In doing so, the Catalan artist not only expressed a new vision of the context that surrounded him, but also performed a productive and critical action in that same context. In other words, Tàpies subverted repression, imposed order and conventional social behavior through creative freedom and referential chaos.

### 3. A geography of fear

The interpretation of the works by Tàpies and Millares reveals the emotional environment of Portugal at the time, in which images interpreted as containing monstrosity, violence and threat had a dramatic resonance. We may identify those same elements in the work of Paula Rego from the 1950s and 1960s. In this period, the artist travelled frequently to Portugal, where she revisited the culture, history

and also the folk stories that shaped her own imagery. Her references also included images of Goya and Velázquez that complemented spaces or landscapes of subjective identification or conflict. For instance, while studying at the Slade School in London, Rego responded to the theme of the 1954 Summer Composition Competition, which was based on Dylan Thomas's radio play *Under Milk Wood*, by depicting a Portuguese kitchen which evoked her childhood memories. In this candid and vernacular scene, she reserved a place for Velázquez's fried eggs recipe, reproducing this meal and the wooden spoon and earthenware from the Spanish painter's *An Old Woman Cooking Eggs* (1618)<sup>8</sup>.

After leaving the Slade in 1956, Rego changed dramatically her creative approach, which developed into an intuitive process that aimed at recapturing the genuine expressionism of children (or of her childhood), according to Jean Dubuffet's conceptualization of the *Art Brut*. Her creative experiments were also contextualized by the post-war artistic practices in Great Britain, especially by a crude and violent approach to reality and an existentialist expression. These references originated an oneiric or even nightmarish atmosphere, inhabited by grotesque and hybrid figures in the paintings and drawings produced by Rego. The Portuguese artist also acknowledged the symbolical potentialities of the materiality of painting. She started to use cuttings from newspapers and from her own drawings and to paste them on the canvas, which she also scratched and hacked<sup>9</sup>. According to Victor Willing, Rego was reacting against domination, in particular against political totalitarianism. Her work thus encapsulated Portuguese historical drama, embodying the "collective guilt"<sup>10</sup> and exorcising the brutality and horror of this period directly through her creative action (Willing, 1971, p. 43).

Portuguese historical drama shared with Spain significant traits – the nostalgia of a glorious past that was anachronically being imposed as cornerstone for the imagining of national identity through violence and war; the totalitarian and repressive nature of the political system, and the political farce of the participation of Portugal and Spain in international platforms among Western democracies. In 1962, Rego presented in Madrid, *Iberian Dawn* in the exhibition organized by the Galeria Diário de Notícias at the Club Urbis. This painting suggested the particular (or peculiar) standing of Portugal and Spain in the international context (Fig. 2).

In the Iberia Peninsula depicted by the Portuguese artist the sun rises upside-down. The landscape is completely pictorial, submitting to the bidimensional nature of the canvas the constitution of a reversed world inhabited by strange creatures. Rego used cuttings to create organic and hybrid figures, which reminded the work of Miró, one of her major references in this period. The surreal and oneiric universe was complemented by a frieze that runs along the upper breadth of the painting with various excerpts of text written on it such as fragments of carols, catholic expressions, excerpts of courtesy letters and children's writing exercises (probably done by her

<sup>8</sup> This painting belongs to the National Galleries of Scotland's collection.

<sup>9</sup> For more information about Rego's relation to British post-war artistic context see Oliveira, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> I am referring here to Read's introduction to the British sculptures that were presented at the Venice Biennale in 1952, which quotes T.S. Eliot's poem *Prufrock*: "these new images belong to the iconography of despair, or of defiance; and the more innocent the artist, the more effectively he transmits the collective guilt. Here are images of flight, of ragged claws 'scuttling across the floors of silent seas', of excoriated flesh, frustrated sex, the geometry of fear" (Read, 1952).



children) and exclamations of “Urray!” and “Victory!”. Are the pieces of paper messages for a distant Europe? Are they a strategy to break isolation and establish communication with others? Ultimately, by claiming a specific cultural and political context, which is underlined by the dispersed writings in Portuguese, this painting projects a geography of fear. Dramatic stories such as *The Dogs of Barcelona*, analyzed earlier, constitute zoomed in images of this territory, which were configured by chaotic evocations of collective memory and subjective experiences. Since the isolation of Portugal and Spain was also imposed by political control of informative contents that circulated in the newspapers, Rego’s intuitive drawing and spontaneous and random writing were an exercise of freedom of expression and communication that was in conflict with the normative social behavior and censorship imposed by totalitarianism.



Figure 2. Paula Rego, *Iberian Dawn*, 1962. Acrylic, graphite and paper glued on canvas, 72,5 x 92 cm. Private collection. © Courtesy of The Artist and Marlborough, New York and London.

#### 4. Haunting specters of the past

Barto dos Santos was also creatively motivated by a cultural and artistic heritage that corresponded to both Spanish and Portuguese political, social and religious narratives, past and present. His imagery was not only inspired by Goya’s prints or the Italian metaphysical art, but also included personal experiences as well. The crossing of the Iberian Peninsula and part of France towards the French capital in 1946 was especially memorable for its threatening and devastated scenery that Santos repeatedly photographed. The vivid images of ruins and land lacerated by war had an impact similar to that of his experience at the Guadalupe Cathedral in Spain, where the young Barto participated in the opening of king Henry IV of Castile’s tomb,

even holding the skull of the “impotent” monarch, which he also photographed (see Melo, 2009, and Santos & Dias, 1999). A poem by T. S. Eliot must have resonated with him as a unifier of these multiple temporalities:

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past. (Eliot, *Four Quartets: Burnt Norton*, ca. 1935).

In his frequent travels to Spain, Santos met contemporary artists and art historians due to the connections established by his grandfather, Reynaldo dos Santos (1880–1970), a well-known doctor and prestigious art historian, who was portrayed by Daniel Vázquez Díaz. Reynaldo dos Santos had close relationships with the physician, historian, scientist, writer and philosopher Gregorio Marañón (1887–1960) and with the archaeologist and historian Manuel Gómez Moreno (1870–1970). The contact with these two major figures of the Spanish intellectual sphere and the influence of his grandfather must have raised in the future artist the awareness of a common creative sensitiveness between Spain and Portugal. Santos would, however, focus his interest in different cultural, political and social references and use in the 1960s the image of the bishops to formulate a critical vision of the Iberia Peninsula in that period (Fig. 3).

Santos later recognized that, although he had not come across Luis Buñuel’s films in that period, his images shared with the Spanish director’s work a surrealistic criticism while contemplating a “peninsular reality” (Santos & Dias, 1999). As in Buñuel’s *L’Age d’Or*, Santos presents in a series of prints from the early 1960s phantasmagorical and cadaveric images of bishops and other characters from the past (soldiers, kings, etc). These spectres emerge in a grotesque and silent apparition to haunt the Portuguese, who are condemned to live within the debris of a supposedly glorious past. The colonial war in Africa had broken out in 1961 and the regime was using a historical narrative connected to a heroic maritime expansion and an evangelical mission to deny autonomy to its colonies. Santos represents therefore an eroded society attached to rotten morals and political precepts that were plunging the country into a surreal phantasy.

Like Rego, his target was authority, the true face of which he wanted to reveal. For this purpose, Santos proceeded by subverting the traditional image of the figures of power, stripping them of their dignity. In the case of the bishops, his petrified and grotesque characters remind us of Bacon’s *Study after Velázquez’s portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953), which connects its physical distortion, the scream that echoes through the picture, to human angst and existential conflict that was suggestive not only of the horror of the Second World War and its mass killings, but also of an introspective reflection on Bacon’s relationship with his father and his sexual orientation (see Sylvester, 2012). However, and unlike the too-human, happily intoxicated monks who populate Goya’s *Caprichos* (1799), Santos created dehumanized figures.

The individual image of a bishop whose appearance seem to have been consumed by time points to the idea that the Iberian countries were living in an anachronical present given the influence that religious authority still had in both Spanish and Portuguese societies. In Santos’s macabre banquets, which are attended by the cadaveric specters of bishops, actions seem to be suspended and time obliterated,

indicating the overlapping of past, present and future that Eliot's poem, cited by the artist, evokes (Santos & Sarre, 1989, n.p.). As a result, the metaphysical atmosphere of these images not only questions the present but simultaneously contains an unsettling perspective on the future. When the series of bishops was produced, the prospect of democratic reform seemed a distant reality in Portugal as the dictatorship reinforced its power and its repressive structure. This was especially the case after the 1958 presidential elections when Humberto Delgado lost his campaign, which until that point had encouraged different anti-regime groups, movements and actions. The manipulation of the election results awarded the victory to the candidate of the regime and Delgado was forced to flee the country (see Delgado, Pacheco & Faria, 1998). He then played an active role in mobilizing the opposition from abroad. However, in February 1965, he was lured to what he believed would be a meeting with a group of Portuguese oppositionists. He travelled with his secretary to a Spanish village, near the Portuguese border, where they were murdered by the political police, possibly with the assent of the Spanish authorities.



Figure 3. Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos, Bishops' meeting, 1962. Aquatint, 57,8 x 79,6 cm. Manuel de Brito Collection, Lisbon Portugal. © The Estate of Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos.

Santos's work expressed, therefore, a period of anxiety about the present and the future which was shared by citizens of both Spain and Portugal. Delgado's assassination points to the complicity of Iberian regimes in maintaining their political power and privileges at any cost. Moreover, their rhetoric was still grounded on an idyllic past that could not provide any reassurance about the future. Santos exposed the fallacious discourse of Iberian dictatorships by using the same instrument: the reference to history. As Paula Barreiro López explained, the Francoist appropriation of Baroque aesthetics resulted in a "a contemporary construction, an image that did not refer to a real body and almost a phantom that intended to transcend time and recall a golden past". So, "the Baroque phantom was invoked in order to give national meaning to artistic practices even as they took a more and more international path

that eluded national characteristics” (López, 2014, p. 716). In the presentation of the Portuguese artists who participated in the São Paulo Biennial throughout the 1950s, the qualities of the national spirit or soul were also reiterated with the same purpose, including ‘the constant baroque influence’ (F.V., 1953–1954, pp. 5–6). Conversely, Santos’s phantoms, although inspired by the same historical sources, claimed a different narrative about the distinctiveness of the Iberian “soul” at that moment, suggesting a sordid drama of decadence and solitude. From the artist’s perspective, cultural identity was not based on a definitive narrative about past glory and accomplishment, but on a critical view that was modelled from the present.



Figure 4. Barto dos Santos, *The Ship of Fools*, 1961. Aquatint, 29,5 × 24,8 cm. Calouste Gulbenkian Museum – Modern Collection, Lisbon, Portugal, GP115. © The Estate of Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos.

## 5. Experimentalism vs Revivalism

Portuguese artists and also art critics opened up a fissure in the nationalistic discourses of the Iberian dictatorships by activating critical perspectives and subversive cultural and artistic operations. They claimed alternative historical accounts and privileged subjective experiences of the contemporaneity. The reviews about the Spanish modern art exhibitions organized in Portugal evidence that the new creative practices and expressions from the other side of the border conveyed an image of political violence that was also representative of the repressive environment lived in Portugal at the time. The references to Tàpies and Millares signaled a conscious commitment to reality even though it revealed itself as a violent and alienating present or an uncertain and obscure future. For Rego and Santos, the reimagining of a cultural and historical past did shape a creative approach to the Iberian political troubles.

Like in Santos's *Ship of Fools*, the Iberian Peninsula was adrift, in a pathetic trance, tied to an imperial heritage that could no longer exist and in awe of a moribund authority (Fig. 4). The use of the image of the ship, the medium of the Portuguese discoveries of "new worlds" and consequently a meaningful icon in the imagery of Portuguese expansion overseas, produced a distorted reflection of the dictatorial propaganda. Rego and Santos reinvented, therefore, the past through the eyes of the present and reconfigured the present through the resources of the past.

Ana Hatherly, a Portuguese scholar specialising in Baroque literature, and a poet, writer and artist,<sup>11</sup> whose artistic work was recently articulated in an exhibition with the Baroque universe,<sup>12</sup> argued that

The incorporation of the past into the present is a subversive action, because one of the most surprising effects of the action of time is the transformation of the usual into the strange, the known into the unknown, the ordinary into the exotic. The incorporation of older elements into a modern context disrupts continuity, disperses the noxious continuity that leads to habit, creating a conflict, a contrast, which cannot help but awaken our consciousness. All culture is dialogue and there is no dialogue without confrontation. (Hatherly, 2017, p. 29)

In the same text, Hatherly made another point which radically distinguishes the appropriation of the past by the artists of the 1960s from the "revivalism" proposed by the Iberian regimes: "the Experimentalists didn't want revivalism: what they wanted and managed to do was to explore operative systems that proved to be as effective in the past as in the present. [...] Experimentalism confronts the present in order to intervene in it, it contests what may be academic or immobilizing about the past, and reacts with what may be dynamic within tradition" (Hatherly, 2017, pp. 29 and 31, endnote 22). The past is not invoked here as memory of specific achievements or contexts that should orientate the present, as a presentification of ethereal qualities that individualize a specific "race" (Portugueseness or the Spanishness). Instead, what we observe in the creative approaches of Rego, Santos and also Hatherly is an appropriation of those dynamic instruments that can act in the present in a meaningful way, be they the open wounds of Lazarus, the iconography of ecclesiastic authority, the visual performativity of language and writing, or Goya's dark sarcasm and Velázquez's sharp look at reality.

Hatherly's theoretical and creative work opens up new perspectives on the creative views of Iberian culture proposed by the Portuguese artists and indicates how those views can be translated as autonomous and critical practices against dictatorship. As a visual artist, and as a precursor in Portugal of concrete and visual poetry, with close connections to the British context and London's artistic milieu, Hatherly referred extensively to Baroque culture, and, for this reason, her visual poems may provide a new reinterpretation of the past: one that constitutes a free intervention in the present and therefore a dissenting standpoint in relation to other "reinterpretations", such as those of the Iberian dictatorships, which aimed at controlling meaning and civic participation. The instinctive movements of her "intelligent hand" converted

<sup>11</sup> As visual artist, Hatherly was a precursor in Portugal of concrete and visual poetry, and she also experimented with performance and video in the 1970s, after settling in London in 1971 to study at the London Film School.

<sup>12</sup> The exhibition *Ana Hatherly and the Baroque: In a Garden Made of Ink* was curated by Paulo Pires do Vale and organized by the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, between 2017 and 2018.

language into visual text and writing into performativity, enabling subjective manifestations and interpretations to arise.<sup>13</sup> Subjectiveness is, ultimately, what the historical narratives presented by Portuguese and Spanish regimes aimed to negate and what the Portuguese artists addressed in this article provocatively reinstated. They based their approach to the past on their experience of the present and hopes and fears about the future.

## 6. Conclusion

During the period analyzed in this article, the dialogue between Portuguese and Spanish contemporary art seems to be limited to state-controlled exhibitions. However, as expressed by the abovementioned art critics, Pernes, França and Gonçalves, who reviewed Spanish art presentations in Portugal, it was possible to interpret in the works of Spanish contemporary artists a shared sense of anguish and torment about the present and an impulse to reconfigure violently the reality shaped by the Iberian dictatorships. This specific experience of the contemporary times is evident in the work of Paula Rego, particularly in her intuitive practice of cutting and pasting into the canvas pieces of her own drawings or newspaper clippings. The violence of her creative gestures and the strangeness of the alternative world they created ultimately configured a powerful attitude of resistance against ideological, social and gender discipline. Viewed from distance, that is, from London, both Portugal and Spain were colored by a similar drama that images of a remote past could more clearly illuminate.

Barto dos Santos also uses eloquently references to a past that could identify both countries. The artist excavated the carcasses of bishops, princes and soldiers and shed light on the true face of the supposedly heroes of the conquest and maritime explorations. In doing so, Santos pointed out that history is not a fixed and definitive account, but rather it should be subjected to revision and criticism. Thus, the macabre, decadent and dilacerated atmosphere and personages of Santos's prints convey the corrosive effects of imperialism and therefore convert the past in a mirror image of the present. As mentioned above, the experience of contemporary times influenced the appropriation of the past by Rego and Santos.

Finally, the approach to Hatherly's theoretical and creative practice in this article synthesizes the articulation between experimentalism and the use of artistic processes and cultural imagery of the past. In Hatherly's view, the rediscovery of the Baroque served a political demand, given the way the Iberian dictatorships were ideologically manipulating the image of this period, but also a creative urgency. The interpretation of contemporaneity and its contradictory and dreadful aspects could benefit from the plasticity, inventiveness and performativity of visual and literary production of the Baroque (see Hatherly, 2017, p. 25). All these tools made possible an alternative visual projection of the present. More than this, they could also identify new possibilities to envisage alternative sociopolitical realities. In conclusion, the artists analyzed in this article not only exposed their political criticism against the Iberian dictatorships,

<sup>13</sup> The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum holds a vast collection of Hatherly's artistic production, which is available online through the website of the museum (<https://gulbenkian.pt/museu/artist/ana-hatherly/>).

but also indicated new forms of self and collective representation that made possible to dissociate self and collective expression from political and ideological discourse.

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